

Missouri State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind



Annual Report Program Year 2024

*Providing individuals who have visual disabilities with
valuable services that effectively address common barriers to employment.*

Cover photograph is of the Old St. Louis Courthouse,
the Arch, and historic buildings.

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From the Chairman of the Missouri State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind

Dear Fellow Missourians:

As Chair of the State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind (SRC), it is my honor to submit the Program Year 2024 Annual Report, sharing the status of services, in accordance with Section 105(5) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Congress in 1998. The SRC was created by Missouri Executive Order 93-01 and is responsible for reviewing, analyzing and advising Missouri Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB), an agency in the Missouri Family Support Division (FSD), on its policies and provision of rehabilitation services to Missourians who are blind or visually impaired. The SRC is made up of a group of individuals who serve or advocate for people who are visually impaired or blind.

RSB provides services that are critical to this growing segment of our population. The CDC reports that during the next three decades, the population of adults with vision impairment and age-related eye diseases is estimated to double because of the rapidly aging U.S. population. In addition, the epidemic of diabetes as well as other chronic diseases will contribute to an increasing population of people who experience vision loss. RSB works to help all these people become or continue to be independent through employment or self-employment.

The SRC is dedicated to working with RSB with their goals to assist blind and visually impaired Missourians become self-supporting and fully participating members of society. Missourians with vision loss can share their experiences both positive and challenging through the SRC, our quarterly reviews of agency policies, procedures and operations, along with public forums and our "customer satisfaction survey". The SRC uses this information to work with RSB and to advise them with expertise in the different areas.

The SRC is committed to its purpose and is rising to meet the growing challenges facing people with vision loss. We feel this report provides an informative overview of RSB and the activities of the SRC. We would be pleased to answer any questions about this report, the operations of RSB, or the work of the State Rehabilitation Council.

Respectfully Submitted,

Geoffrey Q. Barney

Superintendent
Missouri School for the Blind

PROGRAM YEAR 2024 ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$14 million

Federal and State dollars allowed RSB to provide effective, high quality services to blind and visually impaired Missourians.

\$54,350,441.40

Successful services and employment outcomes between the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, as well as the Business Enterprise Program, resulted in an economic impact on Missouri.

This Annual Report outlines these successful services provided by RSB, as well as shares personal success stories by RSB clients.

RSB Client Quote

“Everyone I encountered through RSB were very kind, considerate, efficient, and effective. I am so thankful for the services provided to me.”

Letter from Director of Rehabilitation Services for the Blind



Dear Fellow Missourians,

This annual report, presented to you from the Missouri State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind for Program Year 2024, provides information on the Missouri Department of Social Services, Family Support Division, Rehabilitation Services for the Blind vocational rehabilitation employment program for individuals with visual disabilities.

The Department of Social Service's mission is "Empower Missourians to live safe, healthy, productive lives". RSB completed another successful year in meeting this mission by providing vocational rehabilitation services to 1149 clients with 158 obtaining or retaining competitive integrated employment. Successful services in PY24 resulted in a \$54.3 million economic impact on Missouri.

RSB continues to be a national leader in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. For the past 6 years, Missouri has been one of the highest performing states in the nation. Performance has consistently been well above the national average across all Vocational Rehabilitation agencies.

RSB will continue to streamline processes and embrace new technologies in the provision of client services. I offer my sincere appreciation for your interest and support in serving Missourians who are blind or visually impaired.

Sincerely,

Keith Roderick, Deputy Director

Department of Social Services, Family Support Division, Rehabilitation Services for the Blind

HIGHLIGHTS of PY24

Individuals Served

Individuals with blindness/visual impairments served in Program Year 2024 3,732

Older Blind Independent Living Program

Individuals served in the Older Blind Independent Living Program 1,082

Individuals' cases closed successfully rehabilitated 485

Prevention of Blindness Program

Individuals received case management services in the Prevention of
Blindness Program 642

Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Individuals served in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program 1,149

Closed successful employment 158

Children's Services Program

Children received services in the Children's Services Program 670

Independent Living Program

Individuals served in the Independent Living Program 189

Closed successfully rehabilitated 57

Business Enterprise Program

Business Enterprise Program facilities 26

Military installations 1

People employed 879

Gross sales \$48,452,500

FUNCTIONS

The SRC's functions include, but are not limited to, acting in partnership with RSB to:

- Review, analyze, and advise RSB regarding RSB's performance of responsibilities under Title I of the ACT, relating especially to eligibility for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services; the extent, scope and effectiveness of VR services that RSB provides; and functions performed by State agencies that potentially affect the ability of blind individuals to achieve rehabilitation goals and objectives.
- Assist RSB with the development and review of the State goals and priorities; assist in the preparation of the State plan.
- Conduct a review and analysis of the effectiveness of, and consumer satisfaction with, VR services and other functions performed by State agencies and other public and private entities responsible for performing functions for blind individuals.
- Prepare and submit an annual report to the Governor of the State of Missouri, to the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration of the U. S. Department of Education, and to the Director of FSD.
- Coordinate with other councils within the State.
- Provide for coordination and the establishment of working relationships between FSD, RSB and the Statewide Independent Living Council and Centers for Independent Living in Missouri.
- Select a pool of individuals to serve as impartial hearing officers for VR applicants and recipients who wish to appeal a decision of RSB.

COUNCIL MEMBERS

The membership of the Council is comprised of no more than 21 individuals appointed by the Governor, with the following representation mandated by the Rehabilitation Act.

At least one representative from each of the following:

- Statewide Independent Living Council,
- Parent Training and Information Center,
- Client Assistance Program,
- RSB Vocational Counselor,
- Community Rehabilitation Program service provider,
- State education agency responsible for the public education of students with disabilities,
- State Workforce Investment Board,
- Disabilities group representing individuals who are blind,
- Representative of individuals who have blindness, have multiple disabilities, and have difficulty representing themselves due to disability,
- Business, labor and industry,
- Advocacy groups for individuals with blindness or other authorized representatives of individuals with blindness who are unable to represent themselves,
- Current or former recipients of VR services,
- And the Deputy Director of FSD/RSB as an ex-officio member.

Success Story – Starlyn Ritter



For Starlyn Ritter, a promotion with added job responsibilities came with questions. In addition to her vision loss, from Retinitis Pigmentosa, Ritter's doctors suspected she also had Usher's Syndrome, due to significant hearing loss. Ritter reopened her case with Rehabilitation Services for the Blind after realizing that contrast and brightness adjustments with her computer were no longer a remedy and her additional job responsibilities would require out-of-the-box solutions. Ritter partnered with RSB for that additional guidance and direction. "... After a diagnosis of visual impairment, I faced an uncertain future in the career I loved. The fast-paced environment of emergency care demanded precision, confidence, and unwavering focus..." she recounted.

Ritter wears several hats in her professional life. Registered Nurse, Legal Nurse consultant, Board-Certified Sexual Assault Nurse, and Simulation Coordinator for Phelps Health. Along with her titles, she had telehealth responsibilities that left her on-call with patients. With the worsening hearing, VRC Vicki Rose and Ritter worked with RT Gloria Bailey to find essential adaptive equipment. From a bed shaker that would alert Ritter to her patient's middle-of-the-night calls as a sexual assault nurse, to an Eco stethoscope, which enhances sound clarity during patient examinations, Ritter found herself able to go beyond accepting the promotion and step into an unplanned leadership role.

During one patient interaction, she was able to help diagnose a critical health condition that led to timely life-saving medical intervention for the patient. Ritter found that her adaptive equipment had features that non-adaptive equipment did not include. With her Eco stethoscope, Ritter found she could help train other nurses to identify abnormal heart rhythms using the recording feature of the device. "The specialized stethoscope amplified heart and lung sounds, allowing me to perform thorough assessments with ease. But I didn't stop at just using these tools for myself. Recognizing the potential of my new stethoscope, I took it a step further, demonstrating how it could enhance assessment skills for nurses around me. I led training sessions in my ER department, showing colleagues how to leverage sound technology for more accurate diagnosis," Ritter explained.

Recognizing what she could accomplish with her adaptive equipment, Ritter realized a bigger mission. "My journey was no longer just about overcoming personal challenges; it became a mission to improve patient care across the board... I not only adapted but excelled." Star was honored with the Sexual Assault Survivor Care Award from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services for her leadership in implementing the TeleSane Program, a program that connects local health providers with nurses with sexual assault victims, ensuring timely and specialized care.

When asked about the impact RSB's services have had on her life, Star said "I refused to let circumstances define my ability to provide compassionate and expert patient care. Through vocational rehabilitation for the blind, I gained access to invaluable resources to continue my work. Equipped with cutting-edge technology-a new PC with ZoomText software, advanced hearing aids, and an Eco stethoscope- my success story is one of resilience, innovation, and leadership. By embracing new technology and sharing my knowledge, I not only continued thriving in my career but helped shape a more inclusive, advanced approach to nursing. My story proves that with the right tools, support, and determination, no obstacle is too great to overcome."

RSB Client Quote

"My counselor is very supportive, and I really enjoyed working with her. I don't think I would have trusted working with anyone else."

Vocational Rehabilitation: Earnings and Funding Resources

Program Year 2024

New VR cases opened

248

Clients served

1,149

Average Annual Earnings Per
Rehabilitated Client

\$37,328.74

The following information is based on the above amount.

PY24 Total Annual Wages

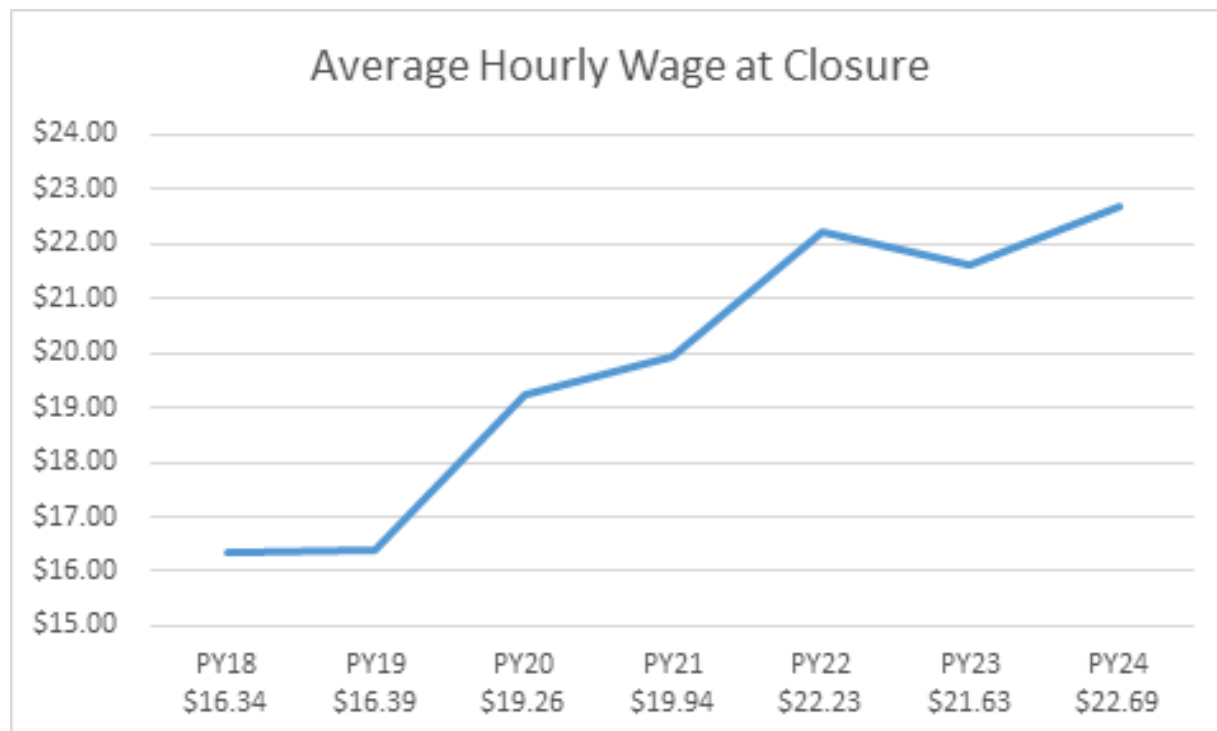
\$5,897,941.40

PY24 Average Weekly Wage

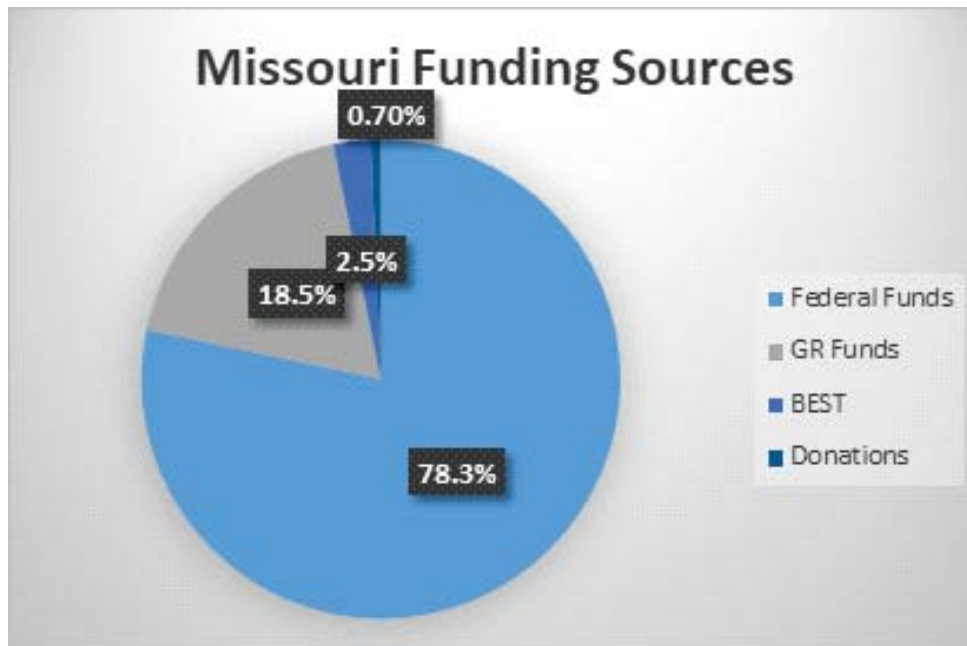
\$717.86

PY24 Average Hourly Wage
at Closure

\$22.69



State Fiscal Year 2024:



Federal Funds 78.3%

GR Funds 18.5%

BEST 2.5%

Donations 0.7%

Success Story – Christopher “Kit” Smith



Christopher “Kit” Smith is an East Coast transplant who grew up in a military family. After his own military career ended, his civilian job landed him in California, however, Smith noticed changes to his vision. Following a post-military career in flooring and general contracting, his employment opportunity evolved into work with insurance companies that dealt with construction defect litigation.

Due to the detailed nature of Smith’s work, Smith’s shrinking field of vision and blurred objects created additional professional struggles. With a family history of vision loss, doctors struggled to diagnose Smith correctly, eventually leading to a formal diagnosis of Stargardt’s disease. As the disease progressed, Smith experienced increased challenges in his work that led to retirement and a relocation to Missouri, where he purchased a farm with his wife, Laura.

In 2021, Kit joined the Heroes to Hives program through the Veterans Administration. This program is designed to increase wellness and financial stability for veterans and their families through immersive training in beekeeping. Kit shared that this program was recommended to him as an option for PTSD treatment as well. Heroes to Hives works closely with the University of Missouri’s (MU) Extension Office. Smith was introduced to Karen Funkenbusch with AgrAbility and after discussing his vision loss, Mrs. Funkenbusch suggested that Kit reach out to RSB.

Initially, Smith was referred to the OBS program through RSB and after discussion with his RT, Jerry Breault and ADD Jim Brinkmann, he recognized his long-term needs would be better served by the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program.

Impressed with Brinkmann’s knowledge of agriculture and foundational blindness skills, Smith agreed to partner with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Linda Johnson and Job Development Specialist Genny Asher to complete an AgrAbility assessment and business plans. “It was extremely helpful. I didn’t know certain things were available ... [they were] honest and helped me understand the program’s limits,” Smith explained when asked about the impact of RSB’s programs.

After an accessibility assessment proved that an internationally outsourced hive would make inspections safer visually and physically, the team worked through the development of a bee therapy shed. At Smith’s Lakeview Acres, this shed allows visitors to enjoy a relaxing listening and breathing experience while the bees work.

Since working with RSB, Lakeview Acres, has evolved from a 40-acre field with horse stables and riding lessons to an innovative, productive apiary with a bee therapy shed and honey producing operation. Most impactful is the confidence Smith exudes as he navigates the day-to-day needs of his farm and business.

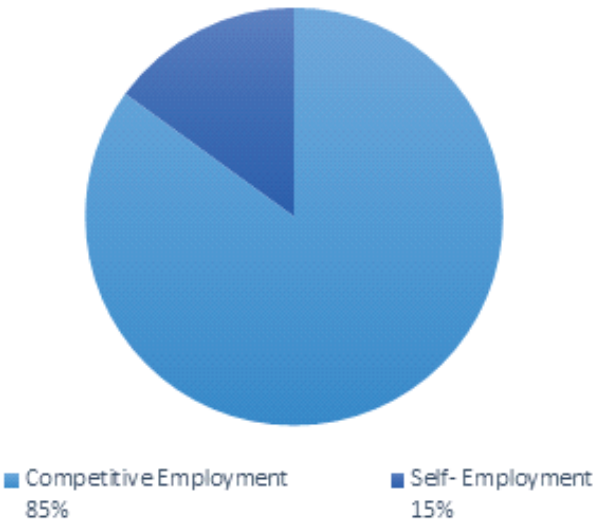
Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Individuals who have a severe visual disability encounter some common barriers to employment. Common barriers recognized are access to print information, transportation, negative attitudes regarding the skills and abilities of the blind as well as marketable 21st century job skills. Rehabilitation Services for the Blind provides valuable services that effectively address these barriers and others.

In PY 2024, RSB successfully rehabilitated 158 Missourians in pursuit of their employment goal. The following data profiles show those successful closures:

Rehabilitation Rate: 84.95%

**Successful Rehabilitated
Missourians**



In PY 2024, through the services of RSB, 158 individuals have been able to gain or retain employment. Their occupations are as follows:

Healthcare Support	12	Office and Administrative	32
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media .	7	Construction and Extraction Occupations .	1
Installation, Maintenance and Repair	2	Personal Care and Service	5
Building and Grounds Cleaning	3	Educational Instruction and Library	11
Legal Occupations	2	Production	6
Business and Financial Operations	6	Sales and Related	15
Architecture and Engineering	2	Food Preparation and Serving	6
Community and Social Service	12	Transportation and Material Moving	3
Management	15	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical . .	3
Computer and Mathematical	5	RSA Special Occupations & Miscellaneous .	5

PY24 Summary of RSB Performance

There are a total of 78 State vocational rehabilitation agencies or commissions that provide rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities in the United States and associated territories.

Currently, 22 states have a separate vocational rehabilitation agency or commission that provides services exclusively for consumers who are blind or visually impaired. The alternative skills of blindness are markedly different from the skills required by other disabled persons. The methodology of instructing the blind and confronting the issues of blindness in our society require the development of specialized service programs, with service delivery by specialized personnel.

Served in VR Program	1,149
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Achieved Employment	158
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Total Annual Wages after Services for Employed Vocational Rehabilitation Clients	\$5,897,941.40
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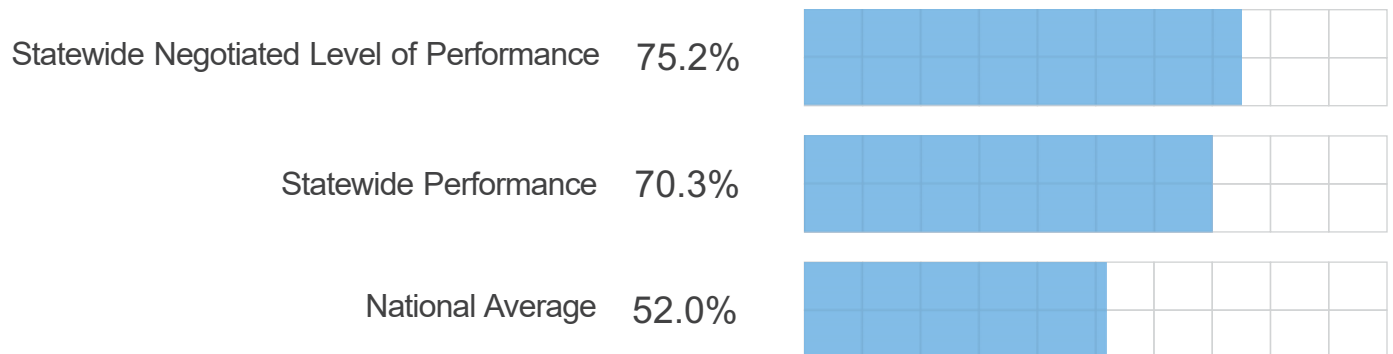
Percentage of Individuals Achieving Self-Sufficiency (Relying Primarily on Their Own Income) After Successfully Completing the Program	78.5%
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Vocational Rehabilitation Rate of Successful Rehabilitation	84.95%
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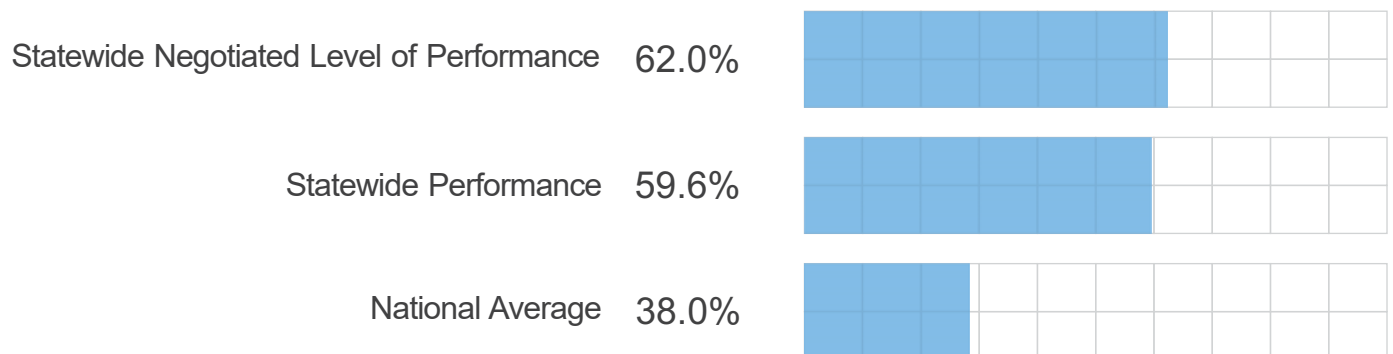
FEDERAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Section 116 of WIOA establishes performance accountability indicators and performance reporting requirements to assess the effectiveness of States and local areas in achieving positive outcomes for individuals served. Statewide levels of performance are negotiated and agreed to by Rehabilitation Services for the Blind, Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation, and Rehabilitation Services Administration. Missouri has been one of the top performing states in the nation, performing well above the national average in most measures. This high level of performance results in higher expectations on negotiated expected levels of performance.

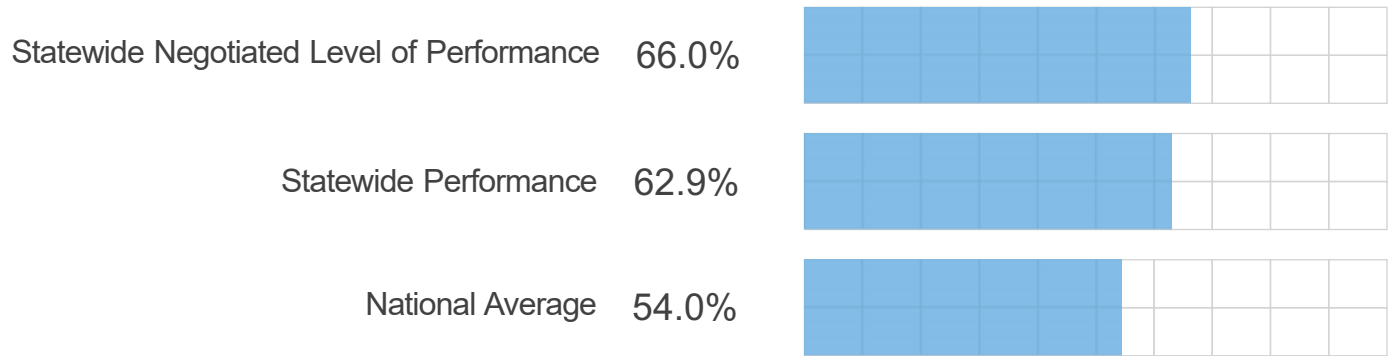
Measurable Skill Gain



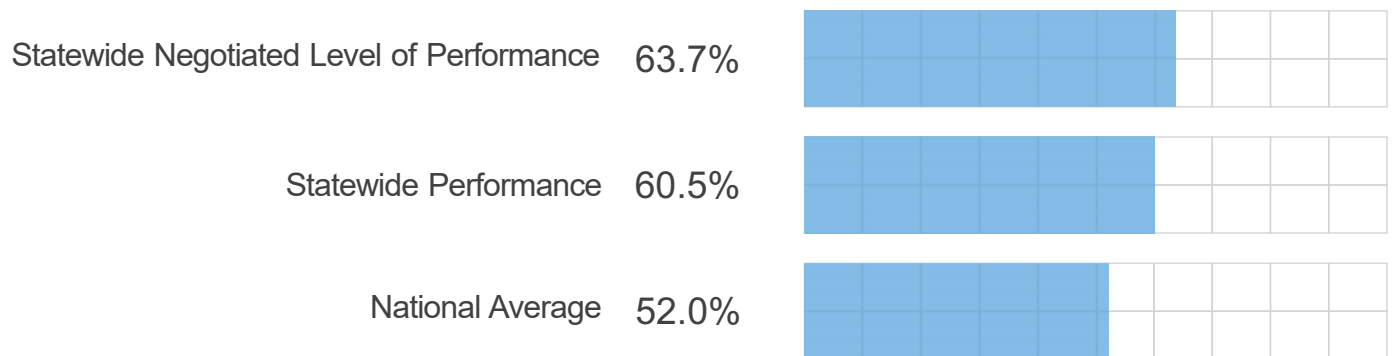
Credential Attainment



Employment, 2nd Quarter Post-Exit



Employment, 4th Quarter Post-Exit



Median Earnings, 2nd Quarter Post-Exit

Statewide Negotiated Level of Performance	\$5,676
Statewide Performance	\$6,860
National Average	\$5,331

RSB Client Quote

“Double the salaries of Laura Cmar, Bobby and Brenda. They are absolutely amazing and perfect reflections of what RSB strives to be ... especially Laura Cmar, who is simply phenomenal!”

Statewide performance combined with MVR resulted in national rankings among all VR agencies of **2nd in Credential Attainment**, **6th in Employment** **2nd Quarter After Exit** and **4th Quarter After Exit**, and **7th in Measurable Skill Gains**.

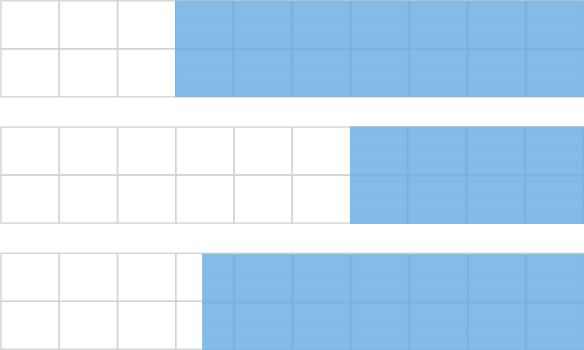
RSB outcomes separate and distinct from MVR has consistently shown agency performance well above the national averages. For the last seven years RSB has a national ranking among blind agencies of **1st** or **2nd** in one or more performance measures. For PY24, RSB ranked **1st** among blind agencies in two federal performance measures.

Measurable Skill Gain

PY24 RSB Performance

RSB National Ranking Among Blind Agencies

Missouri RSB/MVR Combined National Ranking

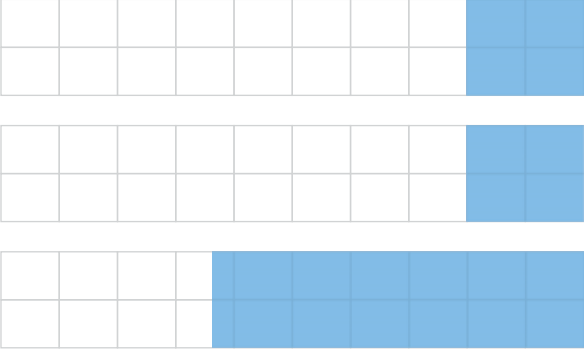


Credential Attainment

PY24 RSB Performance

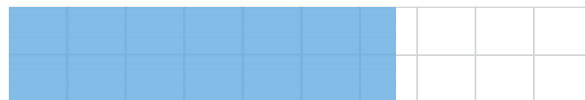
RSB National Ranking Among Blind Agencies

Missouri RSB/MVR Combined National Ranking

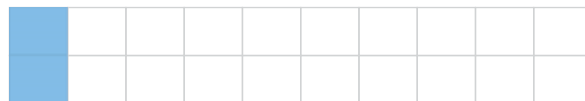


Employment, 2nd Quarter Post-Exit

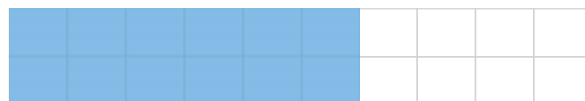
PY24 RSB Performance 65.8%



RSB National Ranking Among Blind Agencies 1st

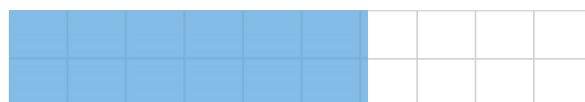


Missouri RSB/MVR Combined National Ranking 6th

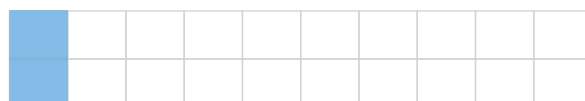


Employment, 4th Quarter Post-Exit

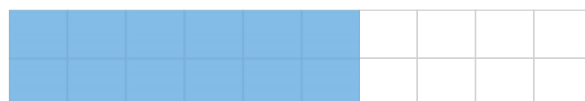
PY24 RSB Performance 61.4%



RSB National Ranking Among Blind Agencies 1st



Missouri RSB/MVR Combined National Ranking 6th



Median Earnings, 2nd Quarter Post-Exit

PY24 RSB Performance \$7,500

RSB National Ranking Among Blind Agencies 13th

Missouri RSB/MVR Combined National Ranking 11th

Client Testimonial – Stephanie Lightfoot



Stephanie Lightfoot spent years working as an office clerk and transcriptionist. Before re-entering the workforce after time as a stay-at-home parent, Lightfoot began to struggle with vision loss due to a diagnosis of Diabetic Retinopathy. Lightfoot recognized that she was struggling with daily living tasks and reached out to RSB. Lightfoot initially received services as an Older Blind Services (OBS) client, hoping to learn how to do tasks without vision. Over time and through her work with Rehabilitation Teacher (RT) Amanda Dovin, she realized re-entry into the workforce with vision loss was possible.

Initially, Lightfoot worked to learn daily living skills and Braille with her RT. RT Dovin noted how quickly she picked up Braille. Through blindness skills training and exposure to adaptive equipment Lightfoot gained confidence in the kitchen and relearned sewing skills. Lightfoot realized that she could not only increase her own independence but also be a strong caregiver for her grandchildren. Eventually, as she continued to build her confidence and increase her independence in her daily life, Lightfoot realized that with practice, training, and equipment, employment could also be an option.

Lightfoot opened a VR case with Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) Jane Zerr. VRC Zerr noted Lightfoot's enthusiasm to re-enter the workforce at her intake. Lightfoot immediately wanted to work with the Job Development Unit at RSB and felt ready to start attending interviews. VRC Zerr, seeking to ensure Lightfoot's ongoing success, worked with Lightfoot to help her understand the VR process and suggested they spend time working together to figure out what assistive technologies and training would benefit Lightfoot and what line of work would suit Lightfoot's current season of life. With VRC Zerr's encouragement, Lightfoot was able to master ZoomText, which allowed her to consider more office and clerical work opportunities. After training, Lightfoot threw herself into job development by attending weekly meetings with her Job Development Specialist at RSB and taking feedback on her resume and interviews.

Lightfoot found successful employment with Hawthorn Children's Psychiatry Hospital as a scheduler. She is passionate about the families she helps and loves the friendships she has developed through her work. Through her work with RSB, Lightfoot noted how she found a job that makes her feel appreciated, respected, and safe.

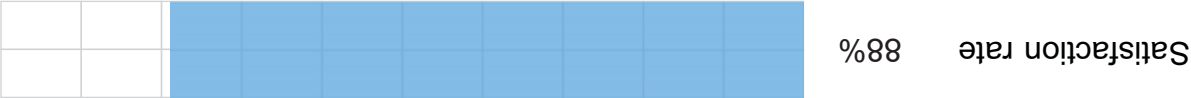
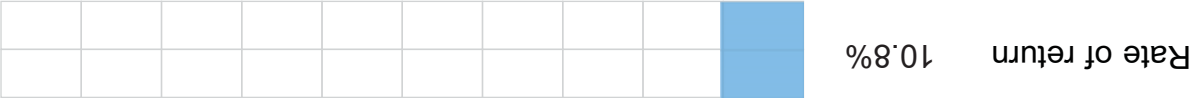
CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

Client Satisfaction Surveys are administered to individuals after closing their Vocational Rehabilitation case with RSB. These surveys are administered on a monthly basis.

Competitive, integrated employment

158 Clients successfully closed in competitive, integrated employment were sent a survey

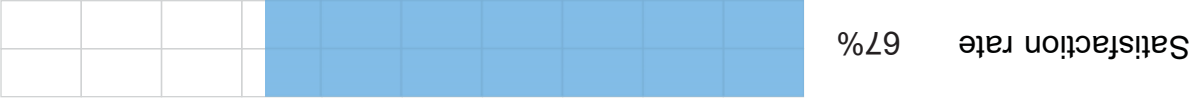
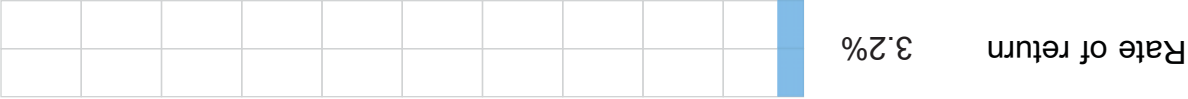
17 Clients returned their survey



Other than competitive employment

94 Clients closed in a status other than competitive employment were sent a survey

3 Clients returned their survey



RSB Client Quote

“Awesome”

Success Story – David LeMunyon



David LeMunyon came to RSB in the spring of 2024 after complications from glaucoma led to a retinal detachment and optic nerve atrophy. LeMunyon also was diagnosed with Charles Bonnet Syndrome, a condition that causes involuntary hallucinations in people with significant vision loss.

LeMunyon has worked remotely for Omaha Public Schools as a Report Developer and Data Analyst, with extensive past work experience in IT for much of his career. Prior to opening a case with RSB, LeMunyon was inverting colors on his screen at work to enhance contrast and making as many adjustments to the screen and fonts as he could find. He struggled with efficiency and worried about his livelihood. LeMunyon's hallucinations involved a "brick wall," which he described to his Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) Krista Cooperman as feeling like "fizzling in and out like a glitch in a video game." He shared that his work was taking him twice as long to complete.

LeMunyon looked to RSB for guidance on what would help him "be more efficient" and what could help with everyday tasks. He worked with VRC Cooperman, to gather information on equipment and training that included ZoomText, a Clover Book Pro, and a handheld magnifier.

With his new equipment and training, LeMunyon noticed that his eye strain was greatly reduced, and his overall work and life productivity increased. Although LeMunyon recognizes that his progressive eye condition will continue to present new challenges, LeMunyon feels like he has stability in his present day-to-day life and a confidence that he can tackle future changes to his vision with RSB as a resource.

RSB Client Quote

"So very thankful for everyone. Such an amazing team!"

PUBLIC FORUMS

The SRC continued to hold public forums throughout the state, allowing individuals to voice opinions and concerns about the services of RSB. To assist those with difficulty traveling, the Council provides phone conferencing as well.

- August:** St. Louis, Mo. Area – Geoff Barney, Superintendent of the Missouri School for the Blind, led a tour of the school and the new interactive playground designed for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
- November:** Jefferson City, Mo – Jane Williams from Love Columbia presented on the different programs that they offer.
- February:** Kansas City, Mo – Howard LaRue and Laurie Due from Alphapointe presented on the various programs offered and the programs that they are working on for the future.
- May:** Joplin, Mo – The meeting was cancelled due to the Chair and Vice-Chair not being available.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The SRC reviews, evaluates, and advises the agency regarding its performance and effectiveness in the delivery of services and the effect of service provision on the achievement of employment outcomes by individuals with disabilities. Additionally, the SRC ensures that the voice of the community of stakeholders is heard as agencies develop and implement policies and procedures that directly affect the individuals served by the VR agency.

During PY 2024, the SRC was actively involved in the activities below:

The SRC voted to update the by-laws to be consistent with current RSA guidance and recommendations.

The SRC provided support and guidance on the selection of a new Impartial Hearing Officer.

The SRC reviewed and provided recommendations regarding the RSB portion of the combined state plan.

The SRC reviewed the Annual Report, reviewed and analyzed the consumer satisfaction surveys, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council's functions.

Public Forums were held quarterly in-person with availability on Webex highlighting each area of the state.

RSB kept the SRC updated on the vacancies within RSB. Issues with difficulty in recruitment were discussed, as well as how accessible the application process is for the blind and visually impaired.

Success Story – LaDonna Allen



Diagnosed with congenital Glaucoma and a recipient of multiple surgeries between 6 months and twelve years, LaDonna Allen is not new to vision loss. She is also familiar with services through RSB, but what she experienced in her recent case with VRC Meghanne Williams was a counselor who left space for discussions around strengths and weaknesses with her client.

Over the last 20 years LaDonna has worked in the publishing industry, working for FSTOP Publishing, writing freelance articles for her local newspaper and serving on the City Council. In past cases her focus with RSB was to have assistance with technology and equipment that would allow her to work. Admittedly, her own previous focus was to stay afloat with the obvious things that would allow her to maintain employment or some semblance of not appearing to struggle with vision. Ahead of her work with RSB, Allen recalled her City Counsel experience that left her feeling uneasy, "... A couple of times when I was sworn into oath, I had to memorize the oath because I couldn't read it."

At her intake in 2024, she acknowledged the similar needs as in her previous cases- that she needed help with equipment to do her job. VRC Williams also noticed a need for adjustment to blindness counseling. VRC Williams encouraged LaDonna to explore barriers in her daily life. "... I've learned to be more open to explaining that I have low vision and need assistance. I realize it's not a weakness to do that, it strengthens your independence That talk we had about this really helped me think about it," Allen explained.

VRC Williams' approach of meeting LaDonna Allen where she was and look beyond the need for equipment allowed LaDonna to see her case differently. "... [Meghanne was] able to give me a lot of wisdom and guidance on things I wouldn't have thought of ..." Allen praised. Beyond equipment for her employment, VRC Williams and LaDonna were able to assess her daily living skills and revisit white cane training and basic mobility skills. As a result, Allen recognized that she is doing more now than when she first started, "RSB came in and did everyday living things ... so you don't just sit in a chair and feel sorry for yourself."

RSB Client Quote

"Thanks for making it possible for me to continue working!"

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

As RSB Strives to create opportunities for the personal and vocational success of blind and visually impaired Missourians, the SRC believes that with the proper training, alternative skills and assistive technology, those individuals who are blind can be vocationally, socially and economically competitive.

The SRC continues to work cooperatively with RSB to improve the services offered to meet what we consider to be the unique rehabilitation needs of clients with visual disabilities. The following top five strategic priorities were developed by the SRC to ensure ongoing success for visually impaired Missourians:

1. Promote the full inclusion, participation and integration of Missouri blind and severely visually impaired in the economic, social, cultural and educational mainstream of society.
2. Through the SRC's advisory capacity, assure that appropriate education and rehabilitation services increase the employment rate of blind and visually impaired individuals in Missouri.
3. Promote and assure the continuation of specialized vocational rehabilitation services to consumers who are blind and severely visually impaired through specially trained professional staff with unique skills and knowledge of blindness.
4. As part of the Employment First initiative, develop a tiered system of benefits planning to expand the benefits planning infrastructure and support more people with disabilities to work, increase their earnings, and use work incentives.
5. In partnership with RSB, the SRC will work to implement new procedures congruent with the expectations of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, in order to ensure coordination of all entities involved increasing access of blind Missourians to today's job market.

RSB Client Quote

“RSB has awesome counselors”

Success Story – Stephanie Dawson

After a serious car accident left Stephanie Dawson with a Traumatic Brain Injury and subsequent vision loss in 2013, Dawson was left with no useable vision in her right eye and no peripheral vision in her left eye. Dawson applied for Vocational Rehabilitation services with RSB in June 2018. Dawson subsequently attended World Services in Arkansas for foundational blindness skills training where she gained skills that increased her independence. Upon her graduation from World Services, Dawson attended college just as the COVID-19 pandemic began. Initially, Dawson enjoyed her academic experience but struggled with distance learning and short-term memory issues because of her TBI. She returned home determined to figure out her next steps. Dawson began volunteering with different organizations to give her experience and exposure. She met regularly with her first Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) Genny Asher and after re-districting, worked with VRC Cerendia Woolums to narrow down interests, practice self-advocacy, and discuss potential barriers. Over time, she pivoted her vocational goal to an employment goal that did not require postsecondary education and began to work with job development services through RSB.

Although Dawson successfully volunteered with the Winona Senior Center helping with activities, she was still uncertain about her vocational direction and what opportunities existed in her rural community. Through her work with Job Developer, Jennifer Zoellner, she learned about the AmeriCorps VISTA Program which would allow her to receive a stipend for working 35 hours a week while remaining at the Winona Senior Center. The AmeriCorps VISTA is a program designed to place members in settings where they can develop new programs and help with infrastructures that help serve low-income communities. RSB's Job Development Unit worked to develop a partnership that would benefit communities and clients. Through the VISTA program, Dawson would gain valuable skills in an environment that was familiar to her, which allowed her to gain confidence in the workforce. [RSB] "gave me the tools I needed, to do what I knew I already could. I have gotten some awesome guidance." Dawson explained. Dawson continues her work with Winona Senior Center as an Activities Director and has started to plan additional activities to benefit seniors, such as a fish fry, an on-going corn hole game, and a card-making program. With confidence about what she can contribute to the workforce and an assured sense of self-advocacy, Dawson is committed to providing opportunities to the seniors in her community.

RSB Client Quote

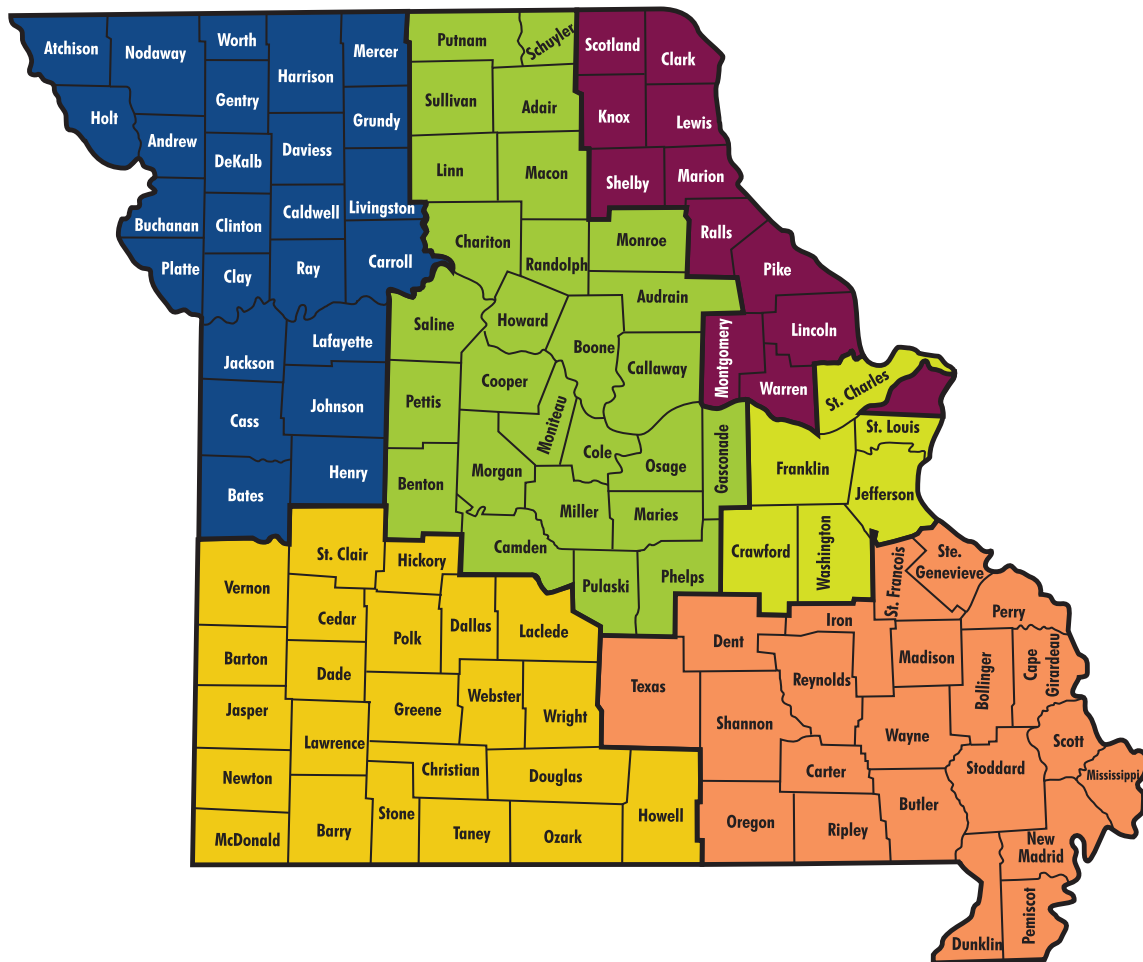
"Krista Cooperman is a great counselor. Over the years I have had several.

She is definitely one of the best."

REHABILITATION SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

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